

UK-Czech Action Plan 2001

updated

Introduction

The UK is strongly committed to the **early accession of the Czech Republic to the EU** and to offering practical support to the Czech Republic in the associated process of reform. Since the Action Plan was first launched in July 2000 by the Czech and British Foreign Ministers, a wide range of British government departments has been working closely with their Czech counterparts to assist in their preparation for EU membership. Many of the original projects have been successfully completed and others are currently underway.

The Czech and British Governments have resolved to build on the achievements of the last year with a new phase of the Action Plan. This new document sets out a range of further UK initiatives to be carried out over the next twelve months. It is the result of discussions between the two Governments and is being launched by Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Czech Republic, Jan Kavan and the British Minister of State for Foreign Affairs, Peter Hain in Prague on 20 September 2001.

Trade & Investment

Commercial relations between the two countries will be vigorously developed, on the basis of the principles of transparency and an open market. Through co-operation between the two countries' Embassies, two-way trade and investment will be actively encouraged. Building on the success of the "**Opportunity Czech Republic**" campaign, the UK will continue to raise awareness of then opportunities for commercial partnership between British and Czech companies through:

- a range of targeted activities to help British companies develop opportunities particularly in the automotive components, electronics, environmental, food and food processing, power, financial services, security, water and mechanical and electrical engineering sectors;
- groups of British companies exhibiting at **Trade Fairs** in the Czech Republic during 2000, including EnviBrno and MSV, and four trade missions in October - February 2002;
- regional **commercial events in Plzen and Most** exploring ways to boost ties between British companies and local companies
- encouraging British companies to pursue EU and other multilaterally funded projects.

The visited Prague in May 2000. This will be followed up through contacts between the British Embassy and British Invisibles - on behalf of the UK Financial Services Industry - and appropriate Czech partners.

As part of the EC Twinning Programme, the UK Department of Trade and Industry, working with Sheffield Hallam University, are delivering a project to strengthen the **competitiveness of Czech suppliers to Multi National Companies (MNCs)**. Its aim is to widen the benefits of inward investment to the Czech Republic and help to increase the competitiveness of Czech indigenous industry prior to EU accession. Two advisers from the Department of Trade and Industry are seconded to CzechInvest (the Czech Inward Investment agency) to implement the project.

The European Policy Directorate of the UK Department of Trade and Industry (DTI) has successfully utilised its bilateral assistance fund, in conjunction with additional assistance from TAIEX, to host a number of inward visits for officials from the Czech Ministry of Industry and Trade. The visits commenced in February 2001 and are expected to continue during 2002. They have covered a variety of single market topics, such as import and export licensing, and wider issues of trade policy. So far, these visits have been very well received by the officials taking part, and it is expected that the links forged between departments will continue after Czech accession to the EU.

Financial Regulation and Corporate Governance

In July 2001 two British consultants completed a long-term programme of support to the Czech Securities and Exchange Commission, funded through the Department of International Development's (DFID's) Know How Fund. British support in this sector will continue, starting in September 2001 with a round table on OECD principles of **corporate governance** to be held at the State Property Fund.

The British Government has supported the research on corruption and economic crime conducted by Transparency International, which will be presented at a major conference in Prague in autumn 2001.

Within the framework of the EC Twinning Programme, a long-term expert from HM Customs and Excise is working to develop policies relating to direct **taxation**. Also, the UK National Audit Office is working closely with the Czech Central Audit Office.

Also under the Twinning Programme, a British expert will be seconded to the Czech Ministry of Finance to work on a project to develop mechanisms for the recovery of the proceeds of money laundering.

The United Kingdom will also explore the scope for helping the Czech Republic to address the problems of regulating the advanced and sophisticated financial sector, through the provision of assistance to the Ministry of Finance, the State Prosecutor's Office and other judicial and financial institutions.

Employment

David Blunkett and Vladimir Spidla signed a Joint Statement on Co-operation between the British Department for Education and Employment (DfEE) and the Czech Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs (MOLSA) in June 1999. The agreement, which related to employment, labour market issues and social security is now managed by the new UK

Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) following changes to the British government structure in June 2001.

Under the umbrella of the agreement co-operation is currently primarily focussed on the PHARE-funded twinning project outlined below. DWP is continuing to explore the possibility of other co-operation activities.

The UK Joint International Unit covering the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) and Department for Education and Skills is currently delivering a PHARE-funded twinning project with the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs (MoLSA) on the development of a Czech National Employment Action Plan for 2002. The project started in October 2000 and will be completed in December 2001. A number of UK experts have visited the Czech Republic to help deliver this project and several secondments and study visits to the UK have taken place for Ministry officials and others.

A second project is expected to start in the autumn to help prepare projects funded from other PHARE mechanisms in recent years to become suitable for European Social Fund funding on the Czech Republic's accession to the EU.

In a separate twinning project, the Health and Safety Executive continues to work with Dutch partners and the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs to develop **best practice in health and safety at work**.

Social Security Reform

The DFID Know How Fund's main activity in the Czech Republic remains its major project with the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs. This includes a root-and-branch review of the **delivery of social services**, their standardisation and accreditation, the introduction of community planning for social services at local level and an institutional review of the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs. Deputy Prime Minister Spidla's visit to Britain in 1999 and the visit of Angela Eagle from the Department of Social Security to Prague provided impetus for this work in June 2000, when the project was officially launched. Since then, Mr Spidla and Ambassador Broucher attended the official presentation of the community plan pilot project in Pisek in July 2001.

Environment

Within the framework of the European Commission's PHARE "Twinning" Programme, a specialist from the Environment Agency is working in Prague on a long-term placement designed to prepare the Czech Republic for implementation of EC **water directives**. The placement has recently been extended to cover the Water Framework Directive.

A significant programme of bilateral assistance complements this work. Following discussions with the Czech Ministry of the Environment, a number of projects have been identified and are currently under preparation. These include assistance to the Czech Ministry of Environment in preparing for the implementation of the **IPPC (Integrated Pollution Prevention and Control)** directive, developing strategies for

investment into environmental infrastructure, and supporting national and local Agenda 21. Short-term assistance has been provided to assist in the application of EC Environmental Impact Assessment Requirements.

A very successful study visit to the UK was organised for 8 officials from the Ministry of Environment in 2001.

In addition, the British Department for the Environment, Transport and the Regions (DETR) plans to provide assistance to the Czech Government in the area of road safety and local transport plans.

Agriculture

One of the most important tasks in preparing for EU membership is to build the relevant administrative structures to handle implementation of the **Common Agricultural Policy**. To this end, there has been close co-operation between the Ministry of Agriculture of the Czech Republic and the British Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs on the administration of dairy intervention, milk quota agreements and good agricultural practices. The regular meetings at official level of the Czech-UK Agricultural Working Group reinforce these links.

Through twinning, there has been intensive collaboration between the relevant administrative bodies in the Czech Republic and Great Britain in respect of establishing the structures required to run the pre-accession rural development fund, known as SAPARD. Twinning efforts will continue in the near future as DEFRA and Ordnance Survey contribute to work on setting up the administrative and mapping requirements for processing agricultural subsidies. In addition, work will begin later this year on a UK-Czech Twinning project to improve the Czech plant health

Police Co-operation and Judicial Co-operation and Judicial Reform

Following the visit of the Lord Chancellor, enhanced co-operation in these areas is planned. The UK has indicated its support for Czech accession to the Lugano Convention. A High Court Judge came to Prague to recommend improvements in the **functioning of Commercial Law** and his report, which contained numerous recommendations, is in the process of being implemented. For example, the British Embassy is to fund six seminars for commercial lawyers over the next year and is collaborating with the Euro-Czech Forum on the establishment of regional fora for judges, lawyers, state administration and the business to community to discuss issues arising from the functioning of the commercial legal system. The Lord Chancellor's Department will also, within the PHARE twinning framework, be partnering the German Ministry of Justice in a wide-ranging judicial reform project from 2002.

Within the framework of the European Commission's twinning programme, a specialist from the Forensic Science service continues his work in Prague on establishing a **DNA database** within the Czech police's organised crime apparatus. In addition, in autumn 2001 a senior British policeman will be working with the Czech Ministry of Interior to develop its administrative capacity to fight organised crime.

The UK continues its long-term programme of assistance and advice from the Metropolitan Police and other forces, to help the Czech police in the **fight against xenophobia**. The last two of seven training workshops will be held in October/November 2001 and the Embassy is examining ways of building on this initiative in 2002 through a programme of training Czech trainers to continue the work. A high-level team of Czech officials will be invited to visit UK in January 2002 to study British practice and policy in fighting xenophobia. This will be followed up by an expert conference in Prague. Britain also continues to fund training courses at the Czech National Police Academy for applicants from ethnic minorities, to help to improve their chances of joining the Czech police.

Human rights

The UK is working closely with the Czech Government Office, as it establishes the office of the **Ombudsman**. This assistance has involved a study tour for the key official tasked with setting up the office, and training in Britain for officials who will work there.

Much work is being done in the field of **minority rights**. Since April 2001 a further £110,000 has been allocated by the British Government to support projects to serve the Romany community. A major project is taking place in the city of Pardubice, where a British Race Equality officer has helped to develop equal opportunities policy for the city. This will be the first policy of its kind in the Czech Republic. At the central government level, a UK Twinner from the Home Office Race Equality Unit is currently working in the Office of the Government, assisting in the development of a racial harmony strategy.

Public Administration Reform

As part of the EC Twinning Programme, a British official was initially seconded to the Czech Ministry of Industry and Trade and is currently working with the Office for Protection of Economic competition to help the Czech authorities develop their institutional and administrative capacity to comply with the EU **State Aid acquis**. This project began in October 1999 and will end in December 2001.

The Scottish Executive is leading on a complex Twinning Project aimed at preparing the Czech administration for receiving **EU Structural Funds**, which will come to an end in September 2001. It has started a follow-on project also covering EU structural funds, which started in September 2001. Scottish Minister of Finance and Local Government, Mr Angus MacKay, visited the Czech Republic for the launch of the project.

In July 2001 a group of eleven regional governors, or hejtman, visited UK at the invitation of the British Embassy to study British practice in local government, and in particular the role of the regions in accessing EU structural funds. The visit generated several ideas for further co-operation, which the Embassy is actively pursuing with the UK Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (DTLR) and Local Government International Bureau. The Foreign and Commonwealth Office is funding short-term secondments to British local authorities for 28 Czech regional officers in

November. DTLR plans to follow this up with a concluding conference in the Czech Republic in early 2002.

Culture, Scholarships and Education

In the past two years the budget for the British government's prestigious "**Chevening Scholarships**" programme has increased by almost 30%. This programme includes the "Chevening European Fellowships" programme, under which selected Czech government officials are trained in EU law and practice.

The British Council will maintain its high profile in the Czech Republic. It promotes best practice in **English Language Teaching** through its national ELT projects and the network of regional libraries which from January 2002 will be run in partnership with Czech institutions. The council will also continue to assist public sector employees in four key ministries to improve their English through its **English for Europe Project**. The Council's long-term programme of cultural events and exchanges continues to flourish.

Officials from the UK Department for Education and Skills have met counterparts from the Czech Education Ministry to explore possible avenues of co-operation, and these discussions will continue with a view to securing a Joint Statement of co-operation in Spring 2002.

Security and Defence

Britain took the initiative in beginning bilateral and multilateral consultations with the Czech Government about the **European Strategic Defence Initiative**, recognising that as a new member of NATO and a prospective member of the EU, the Czech Republic has an important role in the development of policy in this area.

The defence relationship will continue to develop, in Prague, London and Brussels. A new level of co-operation was reached when a **British Military Advisory and Training Team** was established in Vyskov, Moravia, in September 2000. In addition, a British adviser works with the Chief of the General Staff, and Czech officers are trained every year in Britain. Czech policemen destined to work in **Kosovo** are trained in English by the British Council as are Czech military personnel from units assigned to NATO, and for deployment in the Balkans.

Inter-Parliamentary Contacts

The two governments also warmly welcome the development of parliamentary contacts and stand ready to help and facilitate these where appropriate. The House of Lords Committee for the European Union has held a seminar in Prague to inform the Czech Senate's EU Committee about **scrutinising EU legislation**. The EC Scrutiny Committee of the House of Commons visited Prague in July. The Czech Senate has invited the House of Lords Committees on the Economy, Agriculture and Transport to visit Prague. In the opposite direction, the Czech Lower House's sub-committee on prisons visited Britain in June.

Future Action

This Action Plan provides the basis for ongoing cooperation between the UK and the Czech Republic for years to come. In addition to its short-term aim of assisting the Czech Republic in its preparations for EU accession, the Action Plan is designed to foster close and fruitful working relations between Czech and British officials, who will work alongside each other within the European Union.